

ISLAM AND THE UNITY OF MANKIND

By
Maulana Sayyid Jalaluddin Umari

Translated by
Dr. M. Rafat
Professor of Physics
Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

CONTENTS

◉ Publisher's Note	5
◉ Roots of Discord.....	7
◉ Centrality of Aim of Life.....	7
◉ Narrow Aims of Life	8
◉ Welfare of Family and Tribe	8
◉ Welfare of Linguistic Group	8
◉ Concept of Nationalism and its Drawbacks	9
◉ Narrow Objectives are Divisive	11
◉ Narrow Objectives Promote Enmity	11
◉ Concept of "Global Community" and its Weakness ..	12
◉ Unity of Mankind, The Islamic Basis	13
◉ All Human Beings are Slaves of a Single God	13
◉ Worship of Allah is Humanity's Common Objective	14
◉ This is Messengers' Teaching as well	15
◉ An Objective which Unites All Human Beings	15
◉ Common Origin of Man	17
◉ To Disrupt Human Unity is a Mischief.....	18
◉ Multiplicity of Colour, Race and Language is a sign of Allah's Might.....	19
◉ Only "Taqwa" (Piety) is the Basis of Honour.....	22
◉ Correction of Wrong Notions.....	23

✧	Condemnation of Arrogance based On Family or Tribe.....	24
✧	Arrogance of Wealth is condemned	27
✧	“Taqwa” has a Comprehensive Meaning	30
✧	Conclusion.....	31

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

That Islam alone can offer solace to mankind afflicted with ailments both spiritual and societal has been the thesis of Maulana Syed Jalaludding Umari's writings including the present monograph. The author has been remarkably successful in adducing his thesis that the baffling problem of the unity of mankind can be solved by adhering to Islamic teachings. Islam looks upon mankind as a single unit and this does away with all false notions of national and racial prejudice. This ideal, the author argues, can be realized.

The conclusion put forward by the author deserves to be studied with considerable attention, for it underlies a perceptive solution to this baffling problem.

This work is the English Version of Maulana Jalaluddin Umari's Urdu "Islam Aur Wahdat-e-Bani Adam." It has also appeared in Hindi, Marathi, Telgu, Tamil and Gujarati languages.

ISLAM AND THE UNITY OF MANKIND

Roots of Discord

If a survey could be conducted among all human beings of past, present and future regarding their feelings and needs, their responses would be similar. No one would be found bereft of natural feelings of happiness and sorrow. Emotional and physical needs of one person would resemble those of another. In spite of this similarity human beings are divided into mutually quarrelling sects and groups, as if each group possesses a unique nature and has needs distinct from those of other groups. These quarrels would lead one to imagine that an American does not need what an Asian does; basic wants of an European are different from those of an African and emotions of a Roman are irreconcilable with those of a Greek.

Centrality of Aim of life

When human beings are similar in their emotions, interests and needs, what is it that leads them to quarrel with and harm one another? The answer to this puzzle is that every man needs an aim for his life which may become the focus of his aspirations; for which he may sacrifice his resources and energies; and which may provide him solace and satisfaction. Without such an aim of life, man does not find life worth living. In identifying these aims of life, man has been wandering far and wide. This is the starting point of his misery and failure and consequently of mutual quarrels and disputes.

Narrow Aims of life

Majority of human beings have very superficial aims in life. They merely focus on their own needs and at the most on the needs of their family. Some rise above this mundane level but still spend their energies on petty objectives. Any narrow objective, however useful, does not have the capacity of becoming the aim of life of all groups and classes. It is impossible that all of them may devote themselves to it or take interest in it.

This state of affairs is the root cause of all differences and quarrels between human beings.

Welfare of Family and Tribe

Historically, narrow objectives have appeared in a chronological sequence. When people were living in tribes, it was usually suggested that the aim of human life is to serve one's family and tribe. To work for tribe's interest and to support and defend it was considered to be a sacred obligation. This was so because tribe was the natural home of man; it nourished him and developed his capabilities. Hence these capabilities should be spent on serving the tribe. One who fulfilled this obligation was successful indeed! Thus, the usual argument ran. (and was accepted!)

Welfare of a Linguistic Group

In the next stage, it was pointed out that it is not the tribe alone which develops and nourishes an individual. Many other tribes in the vicinity also contribute to this end. To narrow one's service to the native tribe will, therefore, not be proper. Rather, the sphere of a man's services should extend to all those tribes which share a language. Language is the connecting link between tribes. Common language leads to common thought patterns.

Tribes interact and become helpers and friends of one another. These feelings of affinity towards one's family, tribe and linguistic group motivated various acts of service and loyalty. Schemes of welfare were chalked out and implemented, avenues of progress were explored and all this was no doubt beneficial in that limited sphere but simultaneously, the feelings of alienation from other tribes and linguistic groups also arose and gained acceptance. When there was a clash of interests between tribes and linguistic groups, it gave rise to enmity and hatred, often culminating in war and bloodshed. History has been a witness to the resulting disasters.

Concept of Nationalism and its Drawbacks

A linguistic group extends to a few hundred or a few thousand miles. But man's interests usually go beyond this. He is compelled to interact with other individuals and groups which may speak a different language but are otherwise intimately linked to him through economic, social and cultural ties. This close contact is usually found among human beings inhabiting a part of the globe unified by mountains, rivers, crops and climatic conditions and rendered geographically distinct from other parts of the globe. Man benefits from every thing in such a unified geographical region and his culture takes roots in it. It was therefore suggested that man should serve this whole region; though it may have several languages in it and may be inhabited by several communities, tribes and races.

This is the basis of the initial concept of "nation". Other factors have also subsequently contributed to the development of this concept. It is a fact that service to one's nation and homeland has been regarded as a major aim of life in history. Today's age, in particular regards

this as the highest aim of life. Accordingly, to live and die for one's nation and to defend it at all costs, is regarded as man's noblest quality. One who dies for the cause of the nation is fondly remembered, homage is paid to his statue and his name is duly recorded in the nation's archives.

However there are two obvious ill consequences of the nationalistic theory. Firstly it creates narrow mindedness. A true nationalist desires the welfare of his own nation only. He has little concern for the welfare of other nations, except when such welfare may benefit his own nation as well. In each matter, he thinks in terms of narrow national interest. He gladly undertakes whatever is profitable to his nation, though it may harm other nations. However if a thing harms his national interest, he will deem it unnecessary, rather prohibited; though it may immensely profit other nations. He is so loyal to his own nation that he is indifferent to the distinction between just and unjust. If he were to shun this narrow outlook and desire the welfare of each section and group; he would become a humanist and would no longer be regarded as a nationalist.

The second ill consequence of the nationalistic theory is that it does not view all humanity from the same perspective. It creates a number of false standards of high and low among them. Sometimes a particular nation is regarded as superior simply because it has political power and sometimes a nation is regarded as higher because it speaks a particular language or belongs to a particular race. With such is rational conceptions, we can not expect human equality and brotherhood.

Our age is the age of nationalism. Consequently its ill effects are manifest. On the one hand, nationalistic narrow mindedness has emerged with vehemence. To die for one's nation is considered as the highest station of an

individual. On the other hand, the concept of human equality has been totally forgotten. No ruling nation is prepared to concede to the ruled even the elementary right to life. The powerful nations do not tolerate the progress and prosperity of the ruled and put obstacles in their path. In view of such ill effects, how could one maintain that humanity's salvation lies in nationalistic theory or that nationalism may give rise to universal peace and may help in the evolution of a global community.

Narrow objectives are divisive

All narrow aims of life divide humanity; they do not unite it because each narrow aim serves the interest of a group or a class only. It does not consider the interests and welfare of the whole of humanity. Obviously the whole of humanity can not be united on the basis of such narrow conceptions. If a particular tribe or nation is the focus of one's devotion, why should this narrow objective attract people of other tribes and nations? If one's attention remains confined to those sharing a particular tongue, why should people speaking other tongues be interested? If man's aim of life is restricted to the region marked by certain mountains and rivers, why should people of other geographical regions be devoted to such a narrow objective!

Narrow objectives also promote enmity

Narrow objectives sow the seeds of discord in the human family. Each individual belongs to a narrow circle and is not concerned with problems of others. Irrespective of right and wrong, people tend to support their own class or group. International relations are based solely on perceived interests. To harm other nations for the sake of one's national interest, is not regarded as

unethical. As a result, groups and nations are led to fight one another and peace becomes elusive. Dark clouds of war are even now hovering over the globe and humanity is living under a constant shadow of fear. At any moment, all hell may break loose and townships may be converted into deserts and grave-yards.

Concept of “Global Community” and its weakness

To resolve this problem, the concept of global community has been proposed i.e. all nations should be united for promoting their common interests and should work jointly for achieving them. They should live and let live. However to date, this remains only an abstract idea. The world so far, has not accepted it. Ultimately all decisions and actions of man flow from his convictions. Convictions may lead to war or truce and enmity or friendship. If there is a clash of convictions, clashes are bound to occur. A believer in communism obviously can not extend the hand of friendship towards a devotee of capitalism. A nationalist mentality can not tolerate an opponent of nationalism. Clashes of ideologies have always given rise to physical conflict and war. Given the present a clash of ideologies, today, how could one expect amity? This question can not be ignored. Advocates of the abstract concept of “Global Community” have not given any satisfactory answer to this question.

UNITY OF MANKIND

The Islamic Basis

Islam provides a comprehensive and clear concept of the unity of mankind. It builds a firm and solid basis for it. The first element of this basis is that all human beings are creatures and slaves of a single GOD. The second element is that all human beings have a common origin. Hence, inspite of their apparent differences, they are one. On this twin basis, Islam seeks to unite all segments of humanity. All kinds of biases which tend to become obstacles in the unity of mankind, are sought to be removed by Islam. Indeed if the Islamic basis is accepted, the sun of unity may start shining dispelling the existing darkness of discord. Mutually quarrelling groups and nations may be persuaded to live with amity.

(1) All human beings are slaves of a single GOD

Islam provides the correct conception of God. Indeed this concept is the soul of all teachings of Islam. Islam employs forceful reasoning to present the fact that this vast universe.... whose vastness is beyond comprehension is created by a single God and He alone rules over it. Man is one among innumerable creations of God. God is the Creator, the Master and the Ruler of mankind and therefore He alone is worthy of being worshipped and obeyed. He created for man air, water, light, darkness, warmth and cool. He put the sea and the earth to man's service. He is the nourisher and the helper. Life and death,

health and illness and scarcity and abundance are in His control. He listens to prayers and responds to them. He removes hardships and fulfils human needs. He is the ultimate support. No one can come to man's rescue if He does not permit it. His bounties are so numerous, encompassing and comprehensive that man can neither count them nor be adequately grateful for them:

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ
مَاءً فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ رِزْقًا لَكُمْ ۖ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ الْفُلْكَ
لِتَجْرِيَ فِي الْبَحْرِ بِأَمْرِهِ ۖ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ الْأَنْهَارَ ۖ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ
الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ دَائِبَيْنِ ۖ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ ۖ وَاتَّكُمُ
مِنْ كُلِّ مَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُ ۖ وَإِنْ تَعْلُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ لَا تُحْصُوهَا ۖ إِنَّ
الْإِنْسَانَ لَظَلُومٌ كَفَّارٌ ۝

(ابراهيم : ٣٢-٣٣)

"Allah is He Who created the heavens and the earth, and causeth water to descend from the sky, thereby producing fruits as food for you, and maketh the ships to be of service unto you, that they may run upon the sea at His command, and hath made of service unto you the rivers. And maketh the sun and the moon constant in their courses, to be of service unto you, and has made of service unto you the night and the day. And He giveth you to all ye ask of Him, and if ye would count the bounty of Allah ye cannot reckon it. Lo! Man is verily a wrong-doer and ungrateful"

(The Qur'an XIV : 32-34)

Worship of Allah is humanity's common objective

Man has been created for worship and service of his Master. This is the correct position of man in this world.

Thus, man can be grateful to Allah's bounties and may become His slave in the true sense.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ
قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ۝ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ فِرَاشًا
وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءً وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ رِزْقًا
لَكُمْ ۖ فَلَا تَجْعَلُوا لِلَّهِ أَنْدَادًا وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ (البقرة: ٢١-٢٢)

"O mankind! Worship your Lord, Who hath created you and those before you so that ye may ward off (evil). Who hath appointed the earth a resting place for you, and the sky a canopy; and causeth water to pour down from the sky thereby producing fruits as food for you. And do not set up rivals to Allah when ye know (better)." (The Qur'an II: 21-22)

This is Messengers' teaching as well

This teaching was given by all messengers which were sent by Allah for guidance of mankind; in different parts of the globe and in different periods of history. The chain of messengers continued till the last of them Mohammed (peace be upon him).

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا نُوحِي إِلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ
إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدُونِ ۝ (الأنبياء: ٢٥)

"And We sent no messenger before thee but We inspired him (saying): There is no god save Me (Allah), so worship Me." (The Qur'an XXI: 25)

An Objective which unites all human beings

This aim of life is not peculiar to an individual, a class or a nation. It is the aim of the whole of humanity including the rich and the poor, the developed, the developing and the backward, Indians and Chinese, Asians and Europeans, Russians and Americans. Allah has not ordained different objectives for different individuals and groups. Indeed he has given them all a single objective: that of worship and service of Him.

This is the only aim which has the capacity of being the aim of the people of East and West and of North and South simultaneously. Notwithstanding the differences of race, and colour, people can be united for this aim. Non Arabs can not criticise it as being peculiar to Arabs nor the Arabs may object to it, as being for non Arabs. Neither East nor West need feel alien to it. It reflects the aspirations of every human soul. It quenches the thirst inherent in each one of them. This aim has the capacity to attract people of every race and region. To move towards the Creator, the Master and the Benefactor is man's nature. He is constrained to turn to Him and to seek His protection. He longs for His support in moments of distress and wants to be grateful to Him in hours of happiness. Worship and service of Him are in man's own interest; revolt against Him would harm man himself. Moreover, God does not belong to this or that race, family tribe or region. He is omnipresent. He simultaneously observes every one and listens to every one's petitions and extends help. All human beings may establish contact with Him directly; whether they are black or white, labourer or capitalist, landowner or farmer, teacher or taught, ruler or ruled. All are equal before Him. All of them can march towards Him and may seek His kindness and blessings. No one should expect a higher station with Him merely by

virtue of "nobility" of birth or fame and power. Similarly no one is deprived of His attention because of poverty and destitution. Any one moving towards Him is welcome whether he be an African or an American and whether he speaks English or Hindi. Any one willing to surrender to Him will meet no obstacle. He responds to all prayers addressed to Him from anywhere in the universe.

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ ۖ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ
الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ ۖ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ
يَرْشُدُونَ ۝ (البقرة: ١٨٦)

"And when My servants question thee concerning Me, then surely I am nigh. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he crieth unto Me. So let them hear My Call and let them trust in Me in order that they may be led aright".
(The Qur'an II : 186)

This concept that the universe is created by a single God, all human beings are His slaves and are created for His service, demolishes all biases and unites the whole of humanity. False distinctions of superiority can never arise, once this concept is accepted. Feeling of surrender before Allah equalizes servant and master, ruler and ruled, worker and boss, white and black and Arab and non Arab. Forgetting all distinctions, they bow down before Him in unison.

(2) Common Origin of Man

The Qur'an repeatedly explains that the human race has originated from a single soul. From this soul was created its partner and then, from the two of them,

families, tribes and communities came into being. Human population then spread into various regions of the globe. The Qur'an says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ
وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً ۚ
وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ
رَقِيبًا ۝ (النساء : ١)

"O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty, towards Allah in Whom ye claim (your rights) of one another, and towards the wombs (that bore you) Lo! Allah hath been a watcher over you."

(The Qur'an IV : 1)

To disrupt human unity is a grave mischief

The above statement is the clear declaration that all human beings are offsprings of the same parents. From one corner of the globe to the other, they are brethren. Islam does not permit disruption of this bond of brotherhood created by God. Islam is opposed to any such disruptive attempt. It regards such attempts as a grave mischief. The Qur'an has narrated, in detail, the story of Pharaoh and Moses. Pharaoh revolted against God and divided the Egyptian nation into two classes of ruler and ruled. Through Moses, Allah eliminated this mischief, helped the oppressed people and removed the oppressors from the surface of the earth.

إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ عَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلَ أَهْلَهَا شِيَعًا يَسْتَضَعِفُ
 طَائِفَةً مِنْهُمْ يَذَّخَّرُ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيِي نِسَاءَهُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ
 الْمُفْسِدِينَ ○ وَنُرِيدُ أَنْ نَمُنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتُضْعِفُوا فِي
 الْأَرْضِ وَنَجْعَلَهُمْ أَئِمَّةً وَنَجْعَلَهُمُ الْوَارِثِينَ ○ وَنُفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ
 يَعْلَمُونَ ○ (القصص: ٢-٤)

"Lo! Pharaoh exalted himself in the earth and made its people castes. A tribe among them be oppressed, killing their sons and sparing their women. Lo! He was of those who work corruption. And We desired to show favour unto those who were oppressed in the earth and to make them examples and to make them the inheritors. And to establish them in the earth and to show Pharaoh and Haman and their hosts which they feared from them." (The Qur'an XXVIII : 4-6)

Multiplicity of colour, race and language is a sign of Allah's Power

The differences among human beings of colour, race, heredity, language, facial expression, patterns of living, art and craft and nationality are regarded by Islam as a sign among innumerable signs of God. These differences point to the full control of the Creator over the universe. He, according to His will, bestows beauty or ugliness, wealth or poverty. He creates an individual in a particular region of the globe of His choice and teaches him whatever language He wills. None of these things bestow on an individual superiority or inferiority. If they are regarded as pointers to superior or inferior status, it would be tantamount to ignoring their real significance. Such an

ignorant person would be deprived of the insight needed to benefit from Allah's signs.

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ إِذَا أَنْتُمْ بَشَرٌ
تَنْتَشِرُونَ ○ وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا
لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ
لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْتَكِرُونَ ○ وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ
وَاخْتِلَافَ اللِّسَانِ وَالْوَلَوَاتِ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ
لِّعَالِمِينَ ○ وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ مَنَامُكُمْ بِاللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَابْتِغَاؤُكُمْ مِنْ
فَضْلِهِ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَسْمَعُونَ ○ (الروم: ٢٠-٢٣)

"And of His signs is this: He created you of dust, and behold you human beings, ranging widely. And of His signs is this: He created for you helpmates from yourselves that ye might find rest in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy. Verily, in that are signs for those who reflect. And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variations in your languages and your colours: Verily, in that are signs for those who know. And among His signs is the sleep that ye take by night and by day, and the quest that ye (make for livelihood) out of His bounty: Verily in that are signs for those who hearken.

(The Qur'an XXX: 20-23)

The following important facts are highlighted in the above passage of the Qur'an:

- (I) "Allah created man from clay". This statement has demolished arrogance of all types based on the claim of national, racial, economic or intellectual superiority. All human beings are created from clay,

though they may become emperors or members of powerful groups or big capitalists and industrialists or giants in their intellectual or physical capabilities. The basic characteristic of clay is humility. This "creature of clay" may become arrogant, only by forgetting its origin.

- (II) People in their ignorance, had usually classified men and women into two categories of superior and inferior beings. This irrational classification continues to this day, as a ground reality. The Qur'anic statement that "Allah created man's pair from his own kind" cuts at the root of this absurd division. Woman is from man's "own kind" and not from "some other alien kind". The question of superiority and inferiority between man and woman, therefore, does not arise. Allah has united them in love. To promote hatred or enmity between them is against nature.
- (III) The above passage of the Qur'an also describes creation of heavens and earth as a sign of God. This sign is so obvious that it can not be denied by any one. There is a subtle hint that inspite of the vast distances of millions of miles, Allah's command has created a united system of heavens and earth. Without any disruption or clash, the movements in this system continue according to the laws laid down by Allah. Similarly, if human beings on the globe surrender to the commands of God, their mutual quarrels and disputes the would end and would be united.
- (IV) Differences of colour, features and language are also described as signs of the Might of God. These signs of God are meant to be reflected upon for gaining

wisdom. They are not meant for quarreling with one another.

Every one in this world has some physical needs such as sleep and must strive for livelihood. This is again a sign of God. All human beings have needs and these needs are identical. What then, is the rationale of superiority or inferiority among them?

At other places also, the Qur'an draws man's attention towards these facts. If man coolly ponders over them, he will be compelled to regard the whole of humanity as one, inspite of various differences among human beings.

Only "TAQWA" (Piety) is the basis of honour

It is unfortunate that man did not usually regard multiplicity of colour, race, tribe, nationality and language as a sign of Allah's might. Instead, these things became the basis of claims of high or low status. The fact however remains that high or low status is derived from "faith and action" and not from colour or habitat or language. One who proves oneself to be a true slave of God, fears God and truly deserves His bounties, is indeed noble and honourable. One who lacks these qualities has no claim to be honourable, in the sight of God; though the worldly may accord him a high status. The Qur'an is explicit on this point:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاهُ
شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۚ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ
اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ۝ (الحجرات: ١٣)

"O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye

may know one another. Lo! The noblest of you, in the sight of Allah is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware." (The Qur'an IXL: 13)

This statement of Qur'an demolishes all false bases for honour. Merely by birth, no one is superior to any one else. No one is born as "noble" from mother's womb nor any one brings a load of sins with him. Neither a token of superiority nor that of inferiority is attached to him when he is born. Nobility of man is wholly dependent on his own own piety and righteousness. People will be accountable before Allah regarding their piety and not about their heredity or tribal affinity. If one has a pious heart, one will deserve Allah's bounties. If a person's conduct does not reflect the innate fear of God, he will not be able to escape Allah's censure.

Dispelling Wrong Notions

Various tribes and communities had false notions of honour and prestige. The Prophet (peace be upon him) dispelled all such false notions. For the whole of humanity, he accepted only one criterion of nobility and honour i.e. piety. (taqwa)

Condemnation of racial pride

Proponents of racial arrogance throughout human history, have resisted the idea of equal status for all races and have not permitted equitable treatment to others. In his remarkable address delivered on the occasion of the last pilgrimage, the Prophet (peace be upon him) cut at the roots of racial arrogance and proclaimed the unity of mankind. The Prophet said:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ الْإِنِّان رِبْكُمْ وَاحِدٌ وَانْ اِبْاكُمْ وَاحِدٌ اَلَا لَا
فَضْلَ لِعَرَبِيٍّ اَعْلَى اَعْجَمِيٍّ وَلَا لِعَجْمِيٍّ اَعْلَى اَعَرَبِيٍّ وَلَا
لْاَحْمَرَ اَعْلَى اَسْوَدَ وَلَا لْاَسْوَدَ اَعْلَى اَحْمَرَ اَلَا بِالْتَقْوَى
(مسند احمد: ١٠/٢١١)

"O people, behold! Indeed your Lord is one and your father is also one. Behold! An Arab is not superior to a non Arab and a non Arab is not superior to an Arab; a white is not superior to a black and a black is not superior to a white; except on the basis of piety."
(Quoted in Musnad-e-Ahmad)

At the time of the last pilgrimage, the whole of Arabia was under the Prophet's control. The Prophet and his companions were all Arabs. So Arabs could have entertained a sense of their superiority. The Prophet did not allow this feeling to germinate. He asserted that all people are slaves of one God and children of the same father. Honour belongs to one who is pious and God fearing. Talking to one of his companions, Abuzar, the Prophet made the same point in another way:

انْظُرْ اِنَّكَ لَسْتَ بِخَيْرٍ مِنْ اَحْمَرَ وَلَا اَسْوَدَ اَلَا انْ
تَفْضُلُهُ بِالْتَقْوَى (مسند احمد: ١٥٨/٥)

"Look! You are not better than any white or black (person) except that you excel him in piety"
(Quoted in Musnad-e-Ahmad)

Condemnation of arrogance based on family or tribe

Arrogance because of one's "noble" family or tribe has also immensely harmed human unity. The Prophet (peace be upon him) forbade this. As narrated by Abdullah bin Abbas, the Prophet said:

لَا تَفْتَخِرُوا بِأَبَائِكُمُ الَّذِينَ مَاتُوا فِي الْجَاهِلِيَةِ فَوَالَّذِي
نَفْسِي بِيَدِهِ لَمَا يَدْهَدُ الْجَعْلُ بِمَنْخُورِيهِ خَيْرٌ مِنْ أَبَائِكُمُ الَّذِينَ
مَاتُوا فِي الْجَاهِلِيَةِ. (مسند احمد، تحقيق احمد محمد شاكر:

(١٦٠-١٦١/٣)

"Do not be proud of your ancestors who died in the age of ignorance. By (Allah), in Whose hands is my life; the dirt thrown about by an insect is better than those ancestors of yours, who left this world, in the state of ignorance". (Musnad-e-Ahmad)

This point is made in greater detail in another narration. Abu Huraira reports that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

لِيَنْتَهِيَنَّ اقْوَامٌ يَفْتَخِرُونَ بِأَبَائِهِمُ الَّذِينَ مَاتُوا اِنْمَاهُمْ فَحِمُ
جَهَنَّمَ اَوْ لِيَكُونَنَّ اَهْوَنُ عَلَى اللَّهِ مِنْ الْجَعْلِ الَّذِي يَدْهَدُ
الْخَرَاءُ بَانْفِهِ اِنَّ اللَّهَ اَذْهَبَ عَنْكَ عُيْبَةُ الْجَاهِلِيَةِ وَفَخَرَهَا
بِالْأَبَاءِ اِنَّمَا هُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ تَقِيٌّ اَوْ فَاجِرٌ شَقِيٌّ النَّاسُ بَنُو آدَمَ وَآدَمُ خُلِقَ
مِنْ تَرَابٍ (ترمذى. كتاب المناقب. ابوداؤد، كتاب الادب، باب فى التفاخر)

"People should refrain from boasting about their ancestors, who died in the state of ignorance: because they (the ancestors) have become the fuel of hell fire. Otherwise, they would be lower in the sight of Allah than that insect which throws about dirt with its nose. Allah has eliminated the arrogance of the days of ignorance and also the pride in ancestors. Men are of only two types: faithful and God fearing or ill doers and condemned. All people are children of Adam and Adam was created from clay". (Tirmizi)

Samra bin Jandab reports that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

الحسب المال والكرم التقوى (ترمذى: ابواب التفسير، سورة

الحجرات. ابن ماجه، ابواب الزهد، باب الورع والتقوى)

"Heredity is but wealth and nobility is from piety".
(Tirmizi)

Though heredity is related to false notions of honour; but in the eyes of the world, sometime it is wealth which is crucial. The wealthy is also regarded as noble. But real nobility is an entirely different thing. It arises from piety and fear of God.

Abu Huraira reports that the Prophet (peace be upon him) was asked:

"Who is the best among people"? He replied, "One who is most pious". The questioner again said, "we actually want to know some thing else." The Prophet replied, "You want to know about heredity. From that angle Yousuf is the most exalted. He was a prophet and son of a prophet (Yaqub). Again Yaqub was a son of a prophet (Ishaque) who was also son of a prophet (Ibrahim)." "This statement hints at the fact that heredity grants nobility only when peity is present. Prophets of Allah are most God-fearing and pious. Yousuf has the distinction of being a Prophet himself and his three ancestors were also Prophets. Then the companions said; "we are not enquiring about it, either". The Prophet said; "You are asking about the "resources of Arab" so those who were better in the age of "ignorance" will also be better in the age of Islam; provided they cultivate real understanding of Islam". (Bukhari, Muslim)

Here, also the Prophet highlighted the importance of "understanding of religion", instead of heredity. Those who had better capabilities in the past, will be better today, provided they get knowledge of Islam and cultivate its deep understanding.

People used to be proud of their family status. They also used to mock at other's "low" family and heredity status. Neither of these traits is proper. All human beings may have shortcomings and none is free of them. Only Allah is free of all weaknesses. According to Uqba bin Amir, the Prophet said:

إِنَّ أَنْسَابَكُمْ هَذِهِ لَيْسَتْ بِمُسَبَّةٍ عَلَى أَحَدٍ كَلَكُمْ بَنِي
 آدَمَ طِفْ الصَّاعِ لَمْ تَمْلَوْهُ لَيْسَ لِأَحَدٍ عَلَى أَحَدٍ فَضْلٌ إِلَّا بِدِينٍ
 أَوْ تَقْوَى وَكَفَى بِالرَّجُلِ أَنْ يَكُونَ بَذِيًّا بِخِيَالٍ فَاحْشَاءُ.
 (مسند احمد ١٥٨/٢)

"Your heredity is not meant for mocking at others. All of you are children of Adam. (All are imperfect) as you leave the Sa'a (measurement) incomplete. No one is superior except in religion and piety. Loose talking and misery are enough to condemn a person".
 (Musnad-e-Ahmad)

Arrogance of wealth is condemned

Human beings have usually been divided into the wealthy and the poor. The richer sections have oppressed and brutally exploited the poor. This led to the emergence of two antagonistic classes of feudal lords and the labourers; with a continuous struggle between them. Today this class war has risen to its peak. The capitalist seeks to take undue advantage of the worker and the

worker demands more than what is his due. Matters do not end here; rather the economic status of man also becomes the determinant of his honour. The capitalist, thriving on his wealth, claims the position of honour and the worker earning his livelihood by hard work is consigned to disgrace. Islam has eliminated both of these tendencies. On the one hand, it solves the problem of poverty; it prescribes the poor due in the wealth of the rich and puts ethical and legal constraints on earning and consumption. Further Islam motivates every individual to earn and help others as well in finding means of livelihood; and provides relief to those incapable of economic activities. On the other hand, it declares that wealth does not automatically confer prestige. If it is claimed to do so, the claim is wrong. Such notions have to be given up. On the day of judgment, Allah will judge a man by his deeds and not by his wealth. A doer of good deeds will succeed but an evil doer will not escape Allah's wrath. The Qur'an clearly says:

وَمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ بِالَّتِي تُقَرِّبُكُمْ عِنْدَنَا زُلْفَىٰ إِلَّا
 مَنَ أَمَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا ۖ فَأُولَٰئِكَ لَهُم جَزَاءُ الضَّعِيفِ بِمَا
 عَمِلُوا وَهُمْ فِي الْغُرُفَاتِ آمِنُونَ ۝ وَالَّذِينَ يَسْعَوْنَ فِي آلِهَتِنَا
 مُعْجِزِينَ أُولَٰئِكَ فِي الْعَذَابِ مُحْضَرُونَ ۝ (سبا: ٣٨، ٣٩)

"And it is not your wealth nor your children that will near you unto Us, but he who believeth and doeth good (he draweth nearer). As for such, theirs will be twofold reward for what they did and they will dwell secure in lofty halls. And as for those who strive against Our revelations, challenging, they will be brought to the doom." (The Qur'an XXXIV : 37-38)

Wealth has also been used to claim leadership in the society. Those with keys of treasury have also managed to rule over the poor masses and have usually treated them as sub-human animals. Islam changed all this. The Qur'an, by quoting an incident of Bani Israel, explains that wealth by itself does not create the ability of leadership. Rather leadership requires the best intellectual and physical capabilities is an individual. Bani Israel had requested one of their prophets to nominate a commander for them so that they might fight their enemy (the tribe of Amaliqa). The prophet nominated a capable person Taloot. But the community felt infuriated over this selection. They said:

أَتَى يَكُونُ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ عَلَيْنَا وَنَحْنُ أَحَقُّ بِالْمُلْكِ مِنْهُ
وَلَمْ يَأْتِ سَعَةً مِنَ الْمَالِ ۖ (البقرة: ٢٤٧)

"How can he have kingdom over us when we are more deserving of the kingdom than he is, since he hath not been given wealth enough."

(The Qur'an II:247)

To this senseless objection, the Prophet replied:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاهُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَزَادَهُ بَسْطَةً فِي الْعِلْمِ وَالْجِسْمِ ۖ
وَاللَّهُ يُؤْتِي مُلْكَهُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۖ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ۖ (البقرة: ٢٤٧)

"Lo! Allah has chosen him above you and hath increased him abundantly in wisdom and stature. Allah bestoweth His sovereignty over whom He will. Allah is all-embracing, All-knowing".

(The Qur'an II:247)

The Prophet thus pointed out that though Taloot might not be rich, he had extraordinary knowledge and physical capabilities. These qualities were more important in the sight of God; so Taloot should be the leader and his leadership should be accepted.

In the traditions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) also, it is emphasized that for Allah, righteousness and piety are the valuable qualities, instead of possession of wealth. One telling instance is reported by Sahl bin Saad Saaedi. He reports, that a person passed by. (From other narrations, we learn that the passer by belonged to the prestigious tribe of Quraish; was well to do and was wearing good dress.) The Prophet (peace be upon him) asked his companions; "what is your opinion about this person"? Some one replied, "He is one among the noble. If he initiates a proposal of marriage, it would be accepted and a recommendation by him will be honoured". After some time, a poor man passed by. The Prophet asked the people about him also. They said, "he is a poor Muslim; a proposal for marriage by him is not likely to be accepted. A recommendation by him will not be honoured." The Prophet then said, "If the whole of earth was filled with the likes of the person whom you called noble; even then this poor man will be better than all of them." (quoted by Bukhari)

Abu Huraira reports that the Prophet (peace be upon him) once said:

ان الله لا ينظر الى صوركم واموالكم ولكن ينظر الى قلوبكم واعمالكم (مسلم، كتاب البر والصلة، باب تحريم ظلم المسلم)

"Allah does not look at your features or your wealth: He looks at your hearts and your deeds".

(quoted by Muslim)

“TAQWA” has a comprehensive meaning

On other occasions also, the Prophet (peace be upon him) clarified that faith and piety are the real basis of honour. Allah values only these qualities. Piety is a basic Islamic term with a comprehensive meaning. It includes correct knowledge about God, obedience to His commands, regard to the dues of all creatures of God and sincere struggle to establish the good and to eliminate the evil. All these aspects have been explicitly stated in many traditions of the Prophet.

Durrah bint-e-Abu Lahab reports that once while Prophet was addressing his companions; a person asked, “who is the best person?” The Prophet replied as follows:

خير الناس اقراهم واتقاهم لله عز وجل وامرهم بالمعروف
وانهاهم عن المنكر واوصلهم للرحم (مسند احمد: ٢٣٢/٦)

“The best among human beings is one who is ahead in reading Allah’s book, in fearing Allah, in enjoining the good, in forbidding the evil and in joining and maintaining the ties of blood relationship.”

(Musnad-e-Ahmad)

These noble qualities elevate a person to the position of honour. The Prophet (peace be upon him) regarded these qualities as valuable. According to Ayesha, nothing except piety used to impress the Prophet. As reported in Musnad-e-Ahmad;

مَا أَعْجَبَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ شَيْءٌ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا
أَعْجَبَهُ أَحَدٌ قَطُّ إِلَّا ذُو تَقْوَى - (مسند احمد: ٢٩٩/٦)

"The Prophet did not express appreciation over any thing or any person except the pious."

(Musnad-e-Ahmad)

Conclusion

Thus, Islam seeks to create the conviction that all human beings are slaves of God. They are indeed members of a family. They should collectively submit to God. They are one and all of them are created for the same purpose. In the sight of God, no one is low or high; all occupy the same status. Differences of language, colour, community and nationality are all secondary and arise from minor causes. On the day of judgment, these minor things will not determine a person's fate; only faith and action will be the determining factors. Only those will be successful who obey God, possess piety and perform good deeds. Without these noble qualities, a person will not escape Allah's punishment, merely by virtue of his worldly status or heredity. He will suffer only disgrace. This clear conviction given by Islam eliminates all false distinctions of high and low and it unites all human beings not withstanding their differences. Various quarrelling factions of humanity may be brought together only on this basis. There is no other way! But, is the world hastening to this message? Is it ready to accept the solution proposed by Islam?

Only future can answer this question!